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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 SKOPJE 000346

SIPDIS

STATE FOR EUR/SCE

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [MK](#)

SUBJECT: MACEDONIA: PRESSING FOR IMMEDIATE HALT TO CAMPAIGN
VIOLENCE/INTIMIDATION

REF: SKOPJE 339 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: P/E CHIEF SHUBLER, REASONS 1.4(B) AND (D).

SUMMARY

¶1. (C) In a May 26 meeting with PM Gruevski and eAlbanian DPA President Thaci, the Ambassador urged an immediate halt to recent intra-Albanian campaign violence and intimidation that could lead to a failing grade for Macedonia's June 1 snap elections. She warned that the USG would find it difficult to cooperate with a GOM that included a party credibly suspected of being responsible for most of the recent violent incidents and ongoing intimidation. She asked Gruevski and Thaci to rotate out the troublesome "Alpha" police units in northwest Macedonia, which had been connected to the recent violence, and to replace them with Alphas not affiliated with DPA. Both Gruevski and Thaci agreed to the request, but Thaci unconvincingly claimed the violence was incited by an influx of Kosovars supporting rival DUI (an unconfirmed rumor), and that only his Alpha units -- and his armed supporters traveling at night in convoys of vehicles without license plates -- could "protect peaceful Albanians" from DUI-related Kosovars.

CONTINUED VIOLENCE RISKS NEGATIVE ELECTIONS ASSESSMENT

¶2. (SBU) The Ambassador met with PM Gruevski May 26 (and later jointly with both Gruevski and eAlbanian DPA President Thaci) to warn that continued intra-ethnic Albanian violence and intimidation related to the ongoing electoral campaign risked a negative international assessment of Macedonia's upcoming parliamentary elections (reftel). She said Washington wanted Macedonia to succeed and had asked the Embassy to support the GOM in its efforts to ensure free and fair elections. If the situation continued on its present course, however, the USG could find it difficult to cooperate with a government that included a partner credibly suspected of being responsible for the bulk of the violence and intimidation.

¶3. (C) The Ambassador told Gruevski that we were willing to confront Thaci, again and in detail, to demand an end to violence and intimidation, but only as a means of supporting, not replacing, the PM's effort. We would tell Thaci that no party could use police to intimidate opponents and voters, as had been the case in recent weeks. It would be important for the Ministry of Interior (MOI) to order DPA-affiliated "Alphas" (a plainclothes special police unit), many of whom

were suspected of involvement in campaign-related incidents in Tetovo and Gostivar, to be replaced by Alpha units from elsewhere. The Ambassador also raised concerns, shared by ODIHR and the EU, regarding recent reports of convoys of vehicles, without license plates and filled with armed men identified as being affiliated with DPA, cruising the streets of Gostivar and surrounding areas in an open attempt to intimidate voters.

14. (C) Gruevski, complaining that his relations with Thaci were strained, said he had mentioned to the DPA leader the idea of replacing the Alphas, but Thaci had replied negatively, threatening to withdraw all ethnic Albanian police from the MOI. The Ambassador replied that Thaci had no legal or moral right to take such actions, nor did he have the capacity or clout to make good on his threat. Continued violence and intimidation would ruin the elections.

15. (C) Gruevski relented, agreeing to withdraw the Alphas from Gostivar and Tetovo and to replace them with another Alpha unit. He would try to persuade Thaci not to take retaliatory action in response, he said. Comment: At no time did Gruevski seem surprised or outraged that Thaci, who has no formal role at the MOI, would threaten to cripple the police. End comment.

BRODEC WARNING

16. (C) Gruevski opened the meeting with a Macedonian intelligence report indicating that members of an armed

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eAlbanian group, who had been holed up in the mountain village of Brodec until a police raid dislodged them in November 2007, had returned to the area. The leader of the group, Lirim Jakupi (aka "Nazi"), was ensconced with 10 followers in the village of Vejce near Brodec, Gruevski said, and was trying to bring in Kosovar Albanians for additional support.

17. (C) Macedonian authorities suspected that the group was receiving logistics support from persons with ties to the eAlbanian opposition party DUI, that it held a grudge against Thaci, and that Jakupi planned to launch some unspecified terrorist act sometime before the June 1 elections. If necessary, Macedonian law enforcement would intervene against the group, Gruevski said. Comment: While there may be an attempt by former Brodec criminals to return from hiding in Kosovo to Macedonia, the attempt to link these individuals to DUI and the announced plan for a police raid against them days before the elections reflects a clear partisan slant. End comment.

THACI CLAIMS KOSOVARS BEHIND INCIDENTS

18. (C) After Thaci joined the meeting, the Ambassador reiterated the points she had made to Gruevski. She added that the USG remained neutral regarding the outcome of the elections, and government formation, but pointed out that the climate of fear that might suppress voter turnout had to end immediately. She noted that we had emphasized similar points to the ethnic Albanian opposition party DUI, and would closely monitor DUI strongholds in Kichevo and Zajac on Election Day.

19. (C) The Ambassador raised with Thaci the convoys of vehicles filled with armed men cruising sensitive eAlbanian areas. Thaci made no effort to deny these were his men. Instead, he asserted that they were not intimidating the citizens, but were "protecting" them in lieu of police. PM Gruevski evinced no concern at Thaci's armed men patrolling in this manner.

110. (C) Thaci complained that he had been prevented by a

DUI-instigated "barricade" from entering Zajaz (the hometown of DUI leader Ali Ahmeti) that day. He warned that he would use his supporters to prevent any similar incident in Tetovo or Gostivar. He also agreed to withdraw and replace the existing Alpha units in Gostivar and Tetovo, but claimed (despite the fact that the violence has been primarily aimed at DUI) that the spike in recent campaign violence had been caused by an influx of Kosovars backing DUI. He said his Alpha units were the only forces capable of protecting "peaceful Albanians from violent, DUI-related Kosovars."

¶11. (C) The Ambassador replied that we had sent a strong message to DUI to avoid bringing in Kosovar "reinforcements." Our goal was to follow Macedonian law and to have only regular uniformed police providing security at polling stations on Election Day, with the Alphas gathering intelligence on possible incidents (in accordance with their mandate) and the MOI's Rapid Deployment Unit on standby to respond to any incidents. In the meantime, intimidation from any quarter had to cease.

¶12. (C) Thaci said DPA did not want to confront the (alleged) Kosovars, and complained that DUI supporters had attempted to intimidate him and his supporters. If the Alphas were moved from the region, the international community would have to ensure the Kosovars were kept out. Thaci accused DUI leader Ahmeti of trying to create armed enclaves in northwest Macedonia that were closed to the police, and said the presence of Kosovars in Macedonia would only "multiply" that problem.

¶13. (C) The Ambassador told Thaci we would check with KFOR regarding reports of a Kosovar influx into Macedonia (we did, and there isn't). She added that we have another 5-6 days to ensure there are no further incidents, and called on him to use his influence to do so.

¶14. (C) The DCM made the same points to UBK (Counter-Intelligence) Director Mijalkov on May 27. Mijalkov

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said he had just come from a meeting with Thaci, and expressed confidence that the problem had been resolved. Mijalkov promised vigilance against acts of violence and intimidation, and pledged "zero tolerance" for perpetrators of such acts.

COMMENT

¶15. (C) If Gruevski and Thaci follow through and the Alphas currently serving in Gostivar and Tetovo are rotated out of those areas, and replaced by Alphas without ties to DPA, there is a good chance we will see a decrease in campaign violence and other acts of intimidation. We are not overly optimistic about a dramatic improvement in the atmosphere, though. Gruevski clearly is unwilling to confront Thaci, and the DPA leader -- seeing his recent poll figures sagging compared to DUI's strong public support -- is unlikely to give up the bad political habits he and his party have developed over the past several years.
Milovanovic